



## **“I Have Loved You...”**

*Series: Malachi: Remember the Grace of God*

Malachi 1:1-5

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Beloved, I want you to open your Bibles to Malachi 1 this morning and as you do I want us to remember what we are seeking to accomplish as we work our way through the book of Malachi together. As I said last week, Malachi serves as a fitting transition from the season that we have been in as a church – remembering and returning to our first love – back to the gospel of Matthew.

Malachi, you remember, was one of the last prophets before the 400-year silence in between the Old Testament and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The nation of Israel had forgotten God’s love and His grace and so had forgotten what it meant to be the covenant people of God. For that reason, Malachi, speaking for God, brings a series of accusations against the nation that demonstrates how far they had fallen and their desperate need for renewal and revival. Those series of are what are called disputations. The way a disputation works is this. Through Malachi, God makes a statement to the nation of Israel. The prophet then responds to God’s statement, speaking for the nation or the specific people to whom God is speaking – accurately revealing the condition of their hearts and what they were really thinking – and then God answers their objection to what God has said. It is a pattern – “I say this, but you say this. Here’s the truth.” That is the way that this book is set up.

As for us, what we are going to do as we study through this prophecy from Malachi is to hear these accusations against Israel and their weak spiritual condition and then let them serve us as positive exhortations so that we might not fall away from God ourselves or return to where we were before God, in His grace, acted to bring us back to our first love. Ok? So let’s look at this text starting in verse 1 and then we will pray and dig into the text.

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## A Brief History of Israel

I think it probably a good idea, so that we are all on the same page, if I would give just a brief history of the nation of Israel that leads up to Malachi's preaching of these words from God. Israel was a nation that God created by the power of His will out of nothing.

God came to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, a man who was a Gentile pagan, a worshipper of idols, a man who had no desire or longing for the true God and He invaded His life and He called him and commanded Him: ""Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."" (Genesis 12:1-3, ESV)

So Abraham did as He was commanded. He left his home and family behind and he went to a land called Canaan. But you remember there was a problem. Though God had promised that Abraham would be the father of a great nation, his wife, Sarah was barren. She could not conceive. God had closed her womb, but still Abraham, with some hiccups, believed God's promise. Paul in the book of Romans says of Abraham: "He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised." (Romans 4:19-21, ESV) God waited until Abraham was as good as dead and then, miraculously and gloriously, in such a way that only God could receive the praise for her pregnancy, God opened Sarah's womb and Sarah conceived and bore the child of promise – Isaac.

Isaac was married to Rebekah and she gave birth to twin sons – Esau and Jacob. Though Esau was the older of the two, God sovereignly set His love and favor upon Jacob and chose him to be the line through which God would create the nation. ND Jacob, later renamed Israel by God, was the father of the 12 tribes of Israel.

When Jacob/Israel was good and old, and after his son Joseph who had been sold into slavery by his brothers had ascended to the place of Prime Minister in Egypt, the people of Israel, only numbering about 70 at the time, were relocated by God's hand through Joseph to Egypt where

God preserved them from a worldwide famine. There in Egypt the nation grew in number. They were enslaved by Egypt but still they grew in greater and greater number, upwards of 2 million. After 400 years of slavery at the hands of Egypt, God delivered the nation and called them out of captivity, under the leadership of Moses, to worship Him and to receive His commandments and to confirm His covenant with them to be His people. Eventually they would enter the land that was promised to Abraham long ago.

Their history in the Promised Land was one of struggles and battles, of periods of faithfulness and periods of faithlessness, and of discipline and blessing from God. The zenith of Israel, as a nation, came when David, a godly king and the man after God's own heart, was chosen by God to sit on the throne. For forty years, David expanded and extended the nation in size, and influence, in power and in wealth, and in the knowledge and worship of God. God greatly blessed the nation. Solomon reigned after his father in peace and prosperity and Israel, under his leadership, built and dedicated the great temple in Jerusalem for the worship of God.

But things went downhill from there. After Solomon died, Israel split into two kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom consisted of 10 tribes and was called by the name of Israel. The Southern Kingdom consisted of two tribes and was called Judah. Because of their idolatry and sinfulness, the Northern Kingdom was conquered and scattered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Although the Southern Kingdom saw all of this happen, they also continued to rebel against God and chase after idols, despite some short-lived periods of revival, and for their hardness of heart, God brought judgment upon them. In 586 BC. Nebuchadnezzar and the army of Babylon took the Jew captive, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and knocked down its wall and burned the Temple. The people were deported from the land and were forced into slavery in order to discipline them for their sin. This conquest by Nebuchadnezzar was severe discipline ordained by God. His people had forsaken the covenant they made with Him after the Exodus and had given themselves over to idolatry of every sort. Injustice, covetousness, bloodshed and faithlessness had become the norm. God's holy people had utterly defiled themselves, and in so doing, brought upon themselves the discipline of God.

Prophets like Jeremiah, and Daniel called the people to repentance. They said that this captivity would not destroy the nation and eventually God's discipline would come to an end and they would come home. God promised through the prophet Jeremiah: ""For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the

LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.” (Jeremiah 29:10–14, ESV) In 516 BC, God’s promise came to pass.

With the decree of King Cyrus, Israel began to return to the land and be reunited as a nation. Under the direction of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they rebuilt the temple. Then about 60 years later, Ezra led a second group of Jewish refugees back to Jerusalem. God used Ezra to restore worship and instruction in the Word of God. In 445 BC, Nehemiah returned as governor to lead the nation in rebuilding the city walls. But in spite of being back in the land with a new temple and secure walls, Israel was worn-out. They had returned expecting a golden age with Messiah to lead them. It had been eighty long years since the first return of the refugees, and they were growing weary. Worship had become heartless and a weariness. God was given worthless offerings. The priests dishonored God. Israel had become unmoved by God: bored with their faith, negligent in their responsibilities before the Lord. They had begun to doubt God’s promises and complain about their circumstances. It is to these people that Malachi brings the words of God. And the first words from God to Israel are a declaration of His divine love.

A Declaration of Divine Love (v. 2a) Look at the beginning of verse 2: ““I have loved you,” says the LORD” (Malachi 1:2a, ESV) When God seeks to shake Israel out of their spiritual slumber, He does so by reminding them of His gracious love. Literally in this text, the sense of this Hebrew verb means: “I have loved you in the past, I love you now and I will continue to love you in the future.” God speaks through the prophet and declares His love for His people who have grown spiritually apathetic. I want you think about how incredibly gracious this is on the part of God. Think about it. Rather than simply blasting the Jews and hammering them for their lack of love and devotion, rather than simply hammering them for their weak and cheap worship or emphasizing His authority over them, God reminds them of his love. He starts with His love. Having been freely chosen by God to be His holy and peculiar people, rather than being gripped by that thought, they had forgotten His honor and forgotten His grace and regarded God’s love and favor as nothing. And God, rather than simply crushing them for their ingratitude and indifference, instead seeks to awaken them to His love once more. These strong words fro God are rooted in love. That is why God starts right here with the Israelites. God goes directly to the heart and He says “I have loved you.”

Here's the truth, beloved, God knows the root of Israel's malaise, of their dissatisfaction, discontent and apathy toward God was their forgetfulness of God's sovereign and gracious love toward them. Immediately what we are meant to see is that a life that honors and exalts and magnifies God is one that is rooted in a remembrance and recognition of God's gracious love to us. Because they had forgotten God's unique love for them as His people: they were careless in worship; they lacked fear and honor toward the Lord; they were unconcerned about God's truth; they were negligent in their covenant responsibilities; they were faithless in their marriages and families; and they held back their tithes and offerings. They had forgotten that they were the objects of God's love. Forgetting God's love, they forgot who they were.

Israel, in a way that was unlike any other nation, was the object of God's deep, special and personal love, not simply a general love like all of the peoples of the earth, but a special love. Let me explain what I mean. God's special love for the nation of Israel was a definitive and unique love. It was an act of pure grace, a love that was not dependant upon anything that Israel had done or could do. "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 7:7-8, ESV) God's love for Israel was freely and sovereignly given to them. God called Abraham from the Ur of the Chaldees, and God made a covenant with him, and God confirmed that covenant through Isaac and Jacob out of grace. Why did God pick Abraham? Why did God bless his descendants in Jacob and in Isaac? It was simply God's sovereign choice. He did not have to but He chose to love Israel. Third, God's love for Israel is everlasting. "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." (Jeremiah 31:3, ESV) God engraved them on the palms of His hands. "But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me." "Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." (Isaiah 49:14-16, ESV) This is the love of God for His covenant people; this is the love of God for His church, and this is the very love that Israel had forgotten.

Because they had forgotten God's love, because they questioned God's love, they had forgotten whose they were and who they were and their apathetic spiritual lives gave evidence

of that. Thankfully, God was not going to let that slide. So He begins by saying to Israel, “I have loved you...” But Israel’s response is evidence of blinded eyes. Look with me at

Israel’s Denial and God’s Irrefutable Proof of His Love (v. 2b-5) Look at verse 2 again: ““I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” (Malachi 1:2, ESV) Do you hear what Israel is saying? “You love us? How have You loved us?” Israel was looking around and they were saying to themselves: “We are not the political or economic power that we once were. How could God say that He loves us?” They were looking at the consequences that they had to go through, as a result of their sin and idolatry, and because of those consequences; they questioned God’s love for them. Only blinded eyes and hearts of stone could have missed the numerous ways throughout their history by which God had demonstrated His love for His covenant people.

God determines to open their eyes and He does it by saying: “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.”” (Malachi 1:2–3, ESV) If you need me to prove my love to you, let’s go no further than this. Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated. What is God getting at here? Jacob and Esau, like I said before, were twin sons of Isaac. Esau was actually the older brother and by birthright, should have received the blessing of being in the line of Abraham and Isaac, the redemptive line of God. But rather than choosing Esau, God chose Jacob and Jacob’s descendants for this blessing of covenant love and intimacy with God. When God is talking about loving Jacob and hating Esau, He is talking about His electing love, He is talking about His choice of Israel as His own people and not choosing Esau. It is covenant language. God chose Jacob and his descendants for intimate fellowship with Him and did not choose Esau and his descendants for that same privilege or mercy. God loved Jacob/Israel with a special kind of covenant and steadfast love.

Now we need to understand that we are talking about nations here and not every single individual that was an offspring of either Jacob or Esau – when Paul talks about individual election in the NT, he will use this as an example, but right here it refers primarily to nations. It is not that all Edomites were lost or that all Israelites were saved. Again, this is covenant language. God made his covenant with Jacob and passed over Esau. He chose Jacob to stand in a unique, privileged relationship to himself – the line of redemption. God chose Jacob and His offspring, Israel, to have a special place before Him and that special love is made evident in the different ways in which God treated Israel and the Edomites. God says:

“I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,” the LORD of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.’ ” (Malachi 1:3–4, ESV)

Just think about it. Esau and his descendants were sinners just like Israel but unlike Israel they received a full judgment, as a nation, for their sins. Their heritage was destroyed; all they had built was brought to nothing and torn down. They were a people with whom God was angry forever, a people as a whole whose consequences for their sins rested upon them forever. As a nation and as a people, eventually they would disappear and fade into history. They were a nation that would come to nothing as a result of their sin. God did not grant them mercy and grace as a nation – instead they received what their sins deserved.

But standing in stark contrast to God’s dealings with Esau and the Edomites was Jacob – Israel. Because God loved Israel, Israel had been heavily disciplined for her sins. The temple had been destroyed. Their inheritance taken away for a period of time -- they had been exiled from the land that had been given to them by God. Because God loved Israel he would not let her continue in her sin forever and He disciplined the nation to bring her back to Him. But now, their time of discipline was over and they had been restored to the land of promise. They have returned to the land of their inheritance. Here is the key difference with Esau. God had disciplined them severely, but He did not treat them as their sins deserved. He had preserved them as a people in Babylon and brought them back once again to possess the land. God still held out to them a hope and a future because He had a special, enduring, covenant love for them. Though them and to them, Messiah would come. Yes, they had been disciplined by God for their sin but now here was God calling them to covenant faithfulness, calling them to repentance, calling them to remember His love for them, calling them to remember whose they were. God had restored Israel, not Edom.

It is God’s covenant faithfulness to Israel that he offers as proof of his love. It stands in stark contrast to his total rejection of Edom. Edom got what it deserved. Israel did not. When Israel saw God’s judgment on Edom and realized His grace toward Israel, Malachi says, they would understand God’s love toward them and honor him with praise. That is the meaning of verse 5: “Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the Lord beyond the border of

Israel!” (Malachi 1:5, ESV) Israel needed to have her eyes opened to the love of God for her. They needed to have the blinders taken off so that they could see clearly the steadfast and faithful love of God. Israel needed to tremble again at the wonder of God’s love. They needed to tremble again at the enormity, the scope, the perfection of His love toward them, His beloved covenant people.

If we are God’s people, this is an effect that God’s love should have upon all of us. God’s love is a love that should make us to tremble with fear – with awe and reverence and amazement that He would love us. His love ought to humble us. It ought to remove every ground of boasting in ourselves. It ought to shake us out of complacency and self-centeredness. It ought to make us tremble with tears of joy that you belong to God. It ought to inspire us to worship. His love for us makes Him jealous for us as His people. His love guarantees that He will fight for us. His love is promise that He will shepherd us and provide for us, help us to endure, strengthen us and encourage us and discipline us when necessary. His love is a steadfast and enduring love that does not end. It is why God would not ultimately allow His covenant people in Israel, that were truly His by faith, to continue in spiritual lethargy and sluggishness and it is why He would not and will not allow us to do the same. What is the first step of renewal that Malachi gives these people? It's simply this: be gripped again by the eternal never-changing love of God for you, that He chose you in grace to be His treasured possession – live in that love and it will change everything and encompass everything about you.

We need to see that God’s love for us demands a response. It is not that we can earn God’s love to us -- to try to do that is an offense to the free, sovereign, gracious, merciful love of God. God’s love for His people is steadfast and sure and unchanging, but God expects a return on His love. The expectation of a return on His love, a response to His love is not unreasonable. In fact, as we see here, it is exactly what God expects. We must be continually reminding ourselves of God’s love for us -- what that means and what it cost -- and then we will live like those who know God loves them. So what is

The Modern Application of a Centuries’ Old Promise

What is the exhortation for us today? “I have loved you,” says the Lord – I have loved you, I love you now and I will continue to love you – how should these words shape us, beloved?

They should stir us to remember God's love for us, to continually remind our souls of God's love for us. Here's the truth: the root of our love to God and the wellspring of our obedience and our delight and our faith in God; the source of a life of worship and covenant faithfulness to Him is the love that God has showered upon us as His covenant people, a love that he has poured on us when we were lost and sinful and undeserving of anything but judgment. 1 John makes that clear to us: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:9–10, ESV) "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19, ESV) We must be gripped by God's love for us personally and as His people. Our exhortation that comes out of this text is this: Do not forget the greatness of God's love for you. What will that mean for us?

When God says to us, to His people, "I have loved you" there is chiefly only one place that our minds should go first – the cross. God's permanent, lasting, steadfast and supreme expression of His love for His people is the cross. The measure of God's love is not ultimately our physical well-being or our financial standing, not our worldly successes -- the declaration of God's love for us is the cross. It is at the cross that we are brought face-to-face, again and again, with the shocking discovery that just like Israel in this text, God has not dealt with us as our sins deserved. Because of God's eternal love for His people – for us, what we rightly deserved fell on the head of Jesus. He received fully and completely in His body on the tree, the condemnation and judgment and wrath that rightfully should have fallen on us. Because of Christ, God the Father has redeemed us and given us a new and living hope – eternal life with Christ in heaven, where all things are made new, where death and sin and pain and sorrow are no more, and where God the Father will shower the immeasurable riches of His grace upon us forever. It is an infinitely costly hope – purchased by the Son of God for us. For us Isaiah says: "But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5, ESV) As Paul writes in Romans 5: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6–8, ESV)

If we are ever tempted to forget God's love, to forget His grace, go back to the beginning of your faith in Christ and be gripped by His love once again. Remember what it was like to discover that you were loved by God in Christ and be amazed again. That is the great expression of God's love.

Moreover, one of the chief ways that we can guard ourselves against questioning God's love is this. Rather than asking the question: "How have you loved us?", instead we should spend time reciting to God, "This is how you have loved us..." We should be expressing the ways that He has loved us. Some of the ways that God has loved us will be common to all of us and others will be quite specific. For all of us, it should start at the cross and all that the cross encompasses. We need to all be rehearsing daily the truth of Ephesians 1: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace," (Ephesians 1:3–7, ESV) "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:11–14, ESV) When you really know His love to you, His redemption of you and His election of you, personally, you will no more say, "In what way have You loved me?" But you will bow, in speechless but grateful reverence, at His dear feet, worshipping and adoring the greatness of His Infinite Love!

But even more than that we need to be rehearsing to ourselves the ways in which God has show His love to us specifically and individually, and that can differ greatly from one another. For some, we may think of how God has preserved our faith and held us close during a particularly trying time – illness or trial of some sort; the way in which he has drawn us back from sin by His love and His discipline; the way that He has provided a faithful brother or sister with the right word at the right time that kept us from sin or moved us to repentance; the way that He manifested His love through His people when we have been in distress. For me I can trace the love of God throughout my life. He drew me out of home that was pagan and only slightly religious if at all. He ensured that I would go to church and actually hear the gospel, although the church that I went to ended up being exceedingly liberal. He revealed Himself to me when I was not seeking Him or was even consciously aware of it, drawing me to faith in Christ. He saved me and began transforming this warped mind and distorted heart. He began the work of giving me a heart that in enflamed and moved by what matters and which is

increasingly disaffected by the things that don't. He has hedged me in from sin that I would commit and has not allowed me to be content with sin that I have committed. He is continually revealing sin in me and granting repentance, placing me in positions when I must learn to trust completely and only in Him; He receives me graciously where I fail and gives me hope to endure. He has given me a place of honor that I don't deserve in serving Him, given me a wife and family that I don't deserve – creating and establishing a covenant home that has never been before in my family. These things and a million more are evidences of God's unfailing, steadfast, and faithful love toward me—a love that is not a result of my performance but which finds its source in God's heart and His love to me in Christ. God has loved me, He loves me now, and He will love me forever, simply because He has determined to love me.

Do you see how a renewed and a defining vision of God's eternal and sovereign love for us as His people, and for each one of us individually despite our deep unworthiness, is the cure for and prevention of spiritual apathy and carelessness? Do you see how knowing God's love personally and specifically is the cure for a straying heart? Reveling in and delighting in God's is the corrective and the preventative to spiritual indifference and laziness and forgetfulness. When you are keenly aware of the greatness of God's love for you, you will give to him the honor that is due Him as a Father, you will give Him the reverence and awe and fear that is due Him as master. Motivated by His gracious and undeserved love, we will be concerned that He receives the glory that is due to Him as King and Lord over all and for the greatness of His name to be known to the ends of the earth. Moved by His steadfast and unchanging love, we will be stirred to worship Him gladly, joyfully, and with integrity of heart and mind – not just with the appearance of worship but also with the reality of worship displayed in obedient, faithful and holy lives. Grippled by the reality of His unwavering and persistent love, we will long to hear instruction from Him, desire to hear and receive His truth in our souls, and we will trust His word completely. When I know and am convinced of God's love for me, just as I am in Christ, it drives me to live in that love and trust His heart toward me as it is revealed in His Word. When God's redeeming love is in the very forefront of our minds, we will be moved to keep covenant with Him and keep covenant with our wives and our husbands, desiring godly homes and godly offspring. When we are gripped with the treasure of God's love, our grip on the treasures of this earth will be so loosened that we will joyfully and gladly bring the full tithe to God, trusting in His promise to "open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." (Malachi 3:10, ESV) A clear gospel vision of God's love for us leads to a vision for the glory of God going out beyond the borders of these four walls and a missionary zeal that cannot be quenched.

I have loved you – those are God’s word to his covenant people. “I have loved you, I love you now and I will love you forever.” These are words that should grip your soul if you are a member of the covenant people of God. It should constrain your heart and you life. Remind yourself daily of the promise of God’s love and you will not find yourself slipping into apathy and indifference but you will instead a heart that is filled with love and devotion to the God who is devoted and committed to you. You, who are in Christ, by faith, delight yourself in the love of God for you. Do not forget God’s love for you.

In 1916 a hymnwriter named F.M. Lehman wrote a hymn called “The Love of God”. While in an insane asylum, he saw words scribbled on the wall that he copied and made the last stanza in his hymn. They said:

'Could we with ink the ocean fill, And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above, Would drain the ocean dry.  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole, Though stretched from sky to sky'

If that’s crazy, I want to be crazy. I want to be convinced of God’s love like that. Reveling in and delighting in God’s is the corrective and the preventative to spiritual indifference and laziness and forgetfulness. I encourage you, God’s covenant people, to rest and to revel in the love of God to you in Christ.

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